



## Human Zoos or Ethnic Shows? Essence and contingency in *Living* Ethnological Exhibitions

Luis A. Sánchez-Gómez

Facultad de Geografía e Historia, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, Spain.  
e-mail: [langel@ucm.es](mailto:langel@ucm.es)

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this article is to study the *living* ethnological exhibitions. The main feature of these multiform varieties of public show, which became widespread in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Europe and the United States, was the live presence of individuals who were considered “primitive”. Whilst these native peoples sometimes gave demonstrations of their skills or produced manufactures for the audience, more often their role was simply as exhibits, to display their bodies and gestures, their different and singular condition. In this article, the three main forms of modern ethnic show (commercial, colonial and missionary) will be presented, together with a warning about the inadequacy of categorising all such spectacles under the label of “human zoos”, a term which has become common in both academic and media circles in recent years.

**KEYWORDS:** Anthropological Exhibitions; Colonial Exhibitions; Colonialism; Christian Missions; Racism; Exoticism; Ethnography; Völkerschauen

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**Resumen:** *¿Zoos humanos o espectáculos étnicos? Esencia y contingencia en las exposiciones etnológicas ‘vivas’.*- El objetivo del artículo es estudiar las exhibiciones etnológicas *vivas*, una multiforme modalidad de espectáculo público que se extiende durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX y la primera mitad del XX y que presenta como característica esencial la presentación “en vivo” de individuos considerados primitivos. Aunque tales personajes, los nativos, en ocasiones ejecutan ciertas destrezas o elaboran determinadas manufacturas de cara al público, lo más habitual es que su único cometido sea mostrarse a sí mismos, exhibir sus cuerpos y sus gestos, su condición diferente y singular. Revisamos las tres principales formas de show étnico moderno (comercial, colonial y misional) y advertimos sobre lo inadecuado de englobar todos estos espectáculos bajo el calificativo de “zoos humanos”, expresión que se ha extendido tanto en el ámbito académico como en el mediático durante los últimos años.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Exposiciones etnológicas; Exposiciones coloniales; Colonialismo; Misiones cristianas; Racismo; Exotismo; Antropología; Völkerschauen

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## INTRODUCTION

Between the 29th of November 2011 and the 3rd of June 2012, the Quai de Branly Museum in Paris displayed an extraordinary exhibition, with the eye-catching title *Exhibitions. L'invention du sauvage*, which had a considerable social and media impact (figure 1). Its “scientific curators” were the historian Pascal Blanchard and the museum’s curator Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, with Guadalupe-born former footballer Lilian Thuram acting as “commissioner general”. A popular sportsman, Thuram is also known in France for his staunch social and political commitment. The exhibition was the culmination (although probably not the end point) of a successful project which had started in Marseille in 2001 with the conference entitled *Mémoire colonial: zoos humains? Corps Exotiques, corps enfermés, corps mesurés*. Over time, successive publications of the papers presented at that first meeting have given rise to a genuine publishing saga, thus far including three French editions (Bancel *et al.*, 2002, 2004; Blanchard *et al.*, 2011), one in Italian (Lemaire

*et al.*, 2003), one in English (Blanchard *et al.*, 2008) and another in German (Blanchard *et al.*, 2012). This remarkable repertoire is completed by the impressive catalogue of the exhibition (Blanchard; Boëtsch y Snoep, 2011). All of the book titles (with the exception of the catalogue) make reference to “human zoos” as their object of study, although in none of them are the words followed by a question mark, as was the case at the Marseille conference. This would seem to define “human zoos” as a well-documented phenomenon, the essence of which has been well-established. Most significantly, despite reiterating the concept, neither the catalogue of the exhibition, nor the texts drawn up by the exhibit’s editorial authorities, provide a precise definition of what a human zoo is understood to be. Nevertheless, the editors seem to accept the concept as being applicable to all of the various forms of public show featured in the exhibition, all of which seem to have been designed with a shared contempt for and exclusion of the “other”. Therefore, the label “human zoo” implicitly applies to a variety of shows whose common aim was the public display of human beings, with the sole purpose of showing their peculiar morphological or ethnic condition. Both the typology of the events and the condition of the individuals shown vary widely: ranging from the (generally individual) presentation of persons with crippling pathologies (exotic or more often domestic freaks or “human monsters”) to singular physical conditions (giants, dwarves or extremely obese individuals) or the display of individuals, families or groups of exotic peoples or savages, arrived or more usually brought, from distant colonies.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the 2001 conference had been to present the available information about such shows, to encourage their study from an academic perspective and, most importantly, to publicly denounce these material and symbolic contexts of domination and stigmatisation, which would have had a prominent role in the complex and dense animalisation mechanisms of the colonised peoples by the “civilized West”. A scientific and editorial project guided by such intentions could not fail to draw widespread support from academic, social and journalistic quarters. Reviews of the original 2002 text and successive editions have, for the most part, been very positive, and praise for what was certainly an extraordinary exhibition (the one of 2012) has been even more unanimous.<sup>2</sup> However, most commentators have limited their remarks to praising the important anti-racist content and criticisms of the colonial legacy, which are common to both undertakings. Only a few authors have drawn attention to certain conceptual and interpretative problems with the presumed object of study, the “human zoos”, problems which would undermine the project’s solidity (Blanckaert, 2002; Jennings, 2005; Liauzu, 2005: 10; Parsons, 2010; McLean, 2012). Problems which

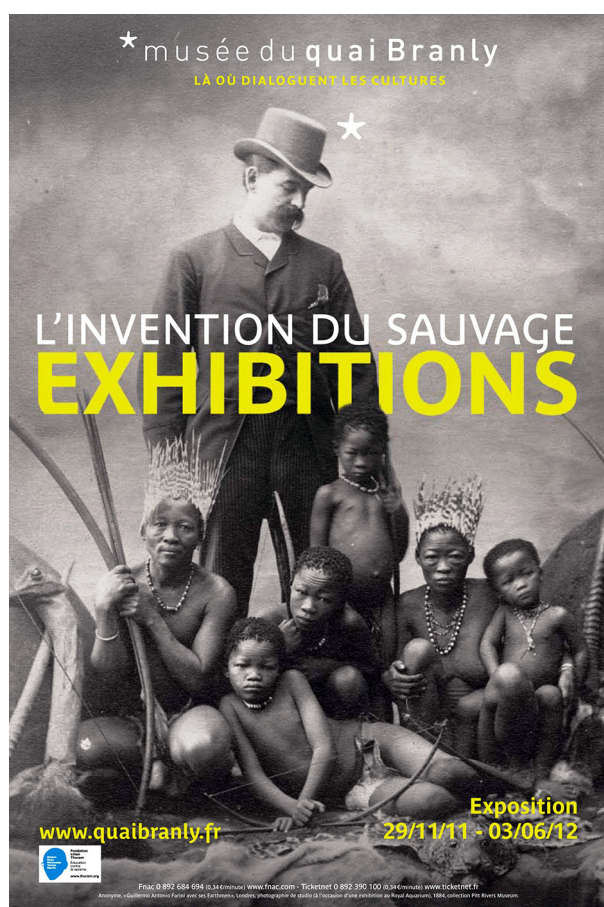


FIGURE 1. Poster for *Exhibitions. L'invention du sauvage*, at the Quai Branly Museum, Paris (<http://www.quaibranly.fr>).

may arise from the indiscriminate use of the concept of the “human zoo” will be discussed in detail at the end of this article.

Firstly, however, a revision of the complex historical process underlying the polymorphic phenomenon of the *living* exhibition and its configurations will provide the background for more detailed study. This will consist of an outline of three groups which, in my view, are the most relevant exhibition categories. Although the public display of human beings can be traced far back in history in many different contexts (war, funerals and sacred contexts, prisons, fairs, etc...) the configuration and expansion of different varieties of ethnic shows are closely and directly linked to two historical phenomena which lie at the very basis of modernity: exhibitions and colonialism. The former began to appear at national contests and competitions (both industrial and agricultural). These were organised in some European countries in the second half of the eighteenth century, but it was only in the century that followed that they acquired new and shocking material and symbolic dimensions, in the shape of the international or universal exhibition.

The key date was 1851, when the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was held in London. The triumph of the London event, its rapid and continuing success in France and the increasing participation (which will be outlined) of indigenous peoples from the colonies, paved the way from the 1880s for a new exhibition model: the colonial exhibition (whether official or private, national or international) which almost always featured the presence of indigenous human beings. However, less spectacular exhibitions had already been organised on a smaller scale for many years, since about the mid-nineteenth century. Some of these were truly impressive events, which in some cases also featured native peoples. These were the early missionary (or ethnological-missionary) exhibitions, which initially were mainly British and Protestant, but later also Catholic.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the unsophisticated ethnological exhibitions which had been typical in England (particularly in London) in the early-nineteenth century, underwent a gradual transformation from the middle of the century, which saw them develop into the most popular form of commercial ethnological exhibition. These changes were initially influenced by the famous US circus impresario P.T. Barnum’s human exhibitions. Later on, from 1874, Barnum’s displays were successfully reinterpreted (through the incorporation of wild animals and groups of exotic individuals) by Carl Hagenbeck.

The second factor which was decisive in shaping the modern ethnic show was imperial colonialism, which gathered in momentum from the 1870s. The propagandising effect of imperialism was facilitated by two emerging scientific disciplines, physical anthropology and ethnology, which propagated

colonial images and mystifications amid the metropolitan population. This, coupled with robust new levels of consumerism amongst the bourgeoisie and the upper strata of the working classes, had a greater impact upon our subject than the economic and geostrategic consequences of imperialism overseas. In fact, the new context of geopolitical, scientific and economic expansion turned the formerly “mysterious savages” into a relatively accessible object of study for certain sections of society. Regardless of how much was written about their exotic ways of life, or strange religious beliefs, the public always wanted more: seeking participation in more “intense” and “true” encounters and to feel part of that network of forces (political, economic, military, academic and religious) that ruled even the farthest corners of the world and its most primitive inhabitants.

It was precisely the convergence of this web of interests and opportunities within the new exhibition universe that had already consolidated by the end of the 1870s, and which was to become the defining factor in the transition. From the older, popular model of human exhibitions which had dominated so far, we see a reduction in the numbers of exhibitions of isolated individuals classified as strange, monstrous or simply exotic, in favour of adequately-staged displays of families and groups of peoples considered savage or primitive, authentic living examples of humanity from a bygone age. Of course, this new interest, this new desire to see and feel the “other” was fostered not only by exhibition impresarios, but by industrialists and merchants who traded in the colonies, by colonial administrators and missionary societies. In turn, the process was driven forward by the strongly positive reaction of the public, who asked for more: more exoticism, more colonial products, more civilising missions, more conversions, more native populations submitted to the white man’s power; ultimately, more spectacle.

Despite the differences that can be observed within the catalogue of exhibitions, their success hinged to a great extent upon a single factor: the representation or display of human beings labelled as exotic or savage, which today strikes us as unsettling and distasteful. It can therefore be of little surprise that most, if not all, of the visitors to the Quai de Branly Museum exhibiton of 2012 reacted to the ethnic shows with a fundamental question: how was it possible that such repulsive shows had been organised? Although many would simply respond with two words, domination and racism, the question is certainly more complex. In order to provide an answer, the content and meanings of the three main models or varieties of the modern ethnic show –commercial ethnological exhibitions, colonial exhibitions and missionary exhibitions– will be studied.



## ETHNOLOGICAL COMMERCIAL EXHIBITIONS: LEISURE, BUSINESS AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCE

Commercial ethnological exhibitions were managed by private entrepreneurs, who very often acted as *de facto* owners of the individuals they exhibited. With the seemingly-noble purpose of bringing the inhabitants of exotic and faraway lands closer to the public and placing them under the scrutiny of anthropologists and scholarly minds, these individuals organised events with a rather carnival-like air, whose sole purpose was very simple: to make money. Such exhibitions were held more frequently than their colonial equivalents, which they predated and for which they served as an inspiration. In fact, in some countries where (overseas) colonial expansion was delayed or minimal –such as Germany (Thode-Arora, 1989; Kosok y Jamin, 1992; Klös, 2000; Dreesbach, 2005; Nagel, 2010), Austria (Schwarz, 2001) or Switzerland (Staehelin, 1993; Minder, 2008)– and even in some former colonies –such as Brazil (Sánchez-Arteaga and El-Hani, 2010)– they were regular and popular events and could still be seen in some places as late as the 1950s. Even in the case of overseas superpowers, commercial exhibitions were held more regularly than the strictly-colonial variety, although it is true that they sometimes overlapped and can be difficult to distinguish from one another. This was the case in France (Bergougniou, Clignet and David, 2001; David, s.d.) and to an even greater extent in Great Britain, with London becoming a privileged place to experience them throughout the nineteenth century (Qureshi, 2011).

Almost all of these exhibitions attracted their audiences with a clever combination of racial spectacle, eroticism and a few drops of anthropological science, although there was no single recipe for a successful show. Dances, leaps, chants, shouts, and the blood of sacrificed animals were the fundamental components of these events, although they were also part of colonial exhibitions. All of these acts, these strange and unusual rituals, were as incomprehensible as they were exciting; as shocking as they were repulsive to the civilised citizens of “advanced” Europe. It is unsurprising that spectators were prepared to pay the price of admission, which was not cheap, in order to gain access to such extraordinary sights as these “authentic savages”. Over time, the need to attract increasingly demanding audiences, who quickly became used to seeing “blacks and savages” of all kinds in a variety of settings, challenged the entrepreneurs to provide ever more compelling spectacles.

For decades the most admired shows on European soil were organised by Carl Hagenbeck (1844–1913), a businessman from Hamburg who was a seasoned wild animal showman (Ames, 2008).

His greatest success was founded on a truly spectacular innovation: the simultaneous exhibition in one space (a zoo or other outdoor enclosure) of wild animals and a group of natives, both supposedly from the same territory, in a setting that recreated the environment of their place of origin. The first exhibition of this type, organised in 1874, was a great success, despite the relatively low level of exoticism of the individuals displayed: a group of Sami (Lap) men and women accompanied by some reindeer. Whilst not all of Hagenbeck’s highly successful shows (of which there were over 50 in total) relied upon the juxtaposition of humans and animals, all presented a racial spectacle of exotic peoples typically displayed against a backdrop of huts, plants and domestic ware, and included indigenous groups from the distant territories of Africa, the Arctic, India, Ceylon, and Southeast Asia (figure 2).

For many scholars Hagenbeck’s *Völkerschauen* or *Völkersausstellungen* constituted the paradigmatic example of a human zoo, which is also accepted by the French historians who organised the project under the same name. They tended to combine displays of people and animals and took place in zoos, so the analogy could not be clearer. Furthermore, the performances of the exhibited peoples were limited to songs, dances and rituals, and for the most part their activities consisted of little more than day-to-day tasks and activities. Therefore, little importance was attached to their knowledge or skills, but rather to the scrutiny of their gestures, their distinctive bodies and behaviours, which were invariably exotic but not always wild.

However, despite their obvious racial and largely-racist components, Hagenbeck’s shows cannot be simply dismissed as human zoos. As an entrepreneur, the German’s objective was obviously to profit from the display of animals and people alike, and yet we cannot conclude that the humans were reduced to the status of animals. In fact, the natives were always employed and seem to have received fair treatment. Likewise, their display was based upon a premise of exoticism rather than savagery, in which key ideas of difference, faraway lands and adventure were ultimately exalted. Hagenbeck’s employees were apparently healthy; sometimes slender, as were the Ethiopians, or even athletic, like the Sudanese. In some instances (for example, with people from India and Ceylon) their greatest appeal was their almost-fantastic exoticism, with their rich costumes and ritual gestures being regarded as remarkable and sophisticated.

Nevertheless, on many other occasions, people were displayed for their distinctiveness and supposed primitivism, as was the case on the dramatic tour of the Inuit Abraham Ulrikab and his family, from the Labrador Peninsula, all of whom fell ill and died on their journey due to a lack of appropriate vaccination. This is undoubtedly one of





FIGURE 2. Postcard of Carl Hagenbeck's "Galla Truppe". Exhibition at the Zoo of Hamburg (Peter Weiss Collection). Spiegel Online (<http://einestages.spiegel.de>).

the best-documented commercial exhibitions, not because of an abundance of details concerning its organisation, but owing to the existence of several letters and a brief diary written by Ulrikab himself (Lutz, 2005). As can easily be imagined, it is absolutely exceptional to find information originating from one of the very individuals who featured in an ethnic show; not an alleged oral testimony collected by a third party, but their own actual voice. The vast majority of such people did not know the language of their exhibitors and, even if they knew enough to communicate, it is highly unlikely that they would have been able to write in it. All of this, coupled with the fact that the documents have been preserved and remain accessible, is almost a miracle.

However, in spite the tragic fate of Ulrikab and his family, other contemporary ethnic shows were far more exploitative and brutal. This was the case with several exhibitions that toured Europe towards the end of the 1870s, whose victims included Fuegians, Inuits, primitive Africans (especially Bushmen and Pygmies) or Australian aboriginal peoples. Some were complex and relatively sophisticated and included the recreation of native villages; in others, the entrepreneur simply portrayed his workers with their traditional clothes and weapons, emphasising their supposedly primitive condition. Slightly less

dramatic than these, but more racially stigmatising than Hagenbeck's shows, were the exhibitions held at the Jardin d'Acclimatation in Paris, between 1877 and the First World War (figure 3). A highly-lucrative business camouflaged beneath a halo of anthropological scientism, the exhibitions were organised by the director of the Jardin himself, the naturalist Albert Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (Coutancier and Barthe, 1995; Mason, 2001: 19–54; David, n.d.; Schneider, 2002; Báez y Mason, 2006). This purported scientific and educational institution enjoyed the attention of French anthropologists for a time; however, after 1886, the Anthropological Society in Paris distanced itself from something that was little more than it appeared to be: a spectacle for popular recreation which was hard to justify from an ethical point of view. In the case of many private enterprises from the 1870s and 1880s, in particular, shows can be described as moving away from notions of fantasy, adventure and exotism and towards the most brutal forms of exploitation. However, despite what has been said about France, Qureshi (2011: 278–279) highlights the role that ethnologists and anthropologists (and their study societies) played in Great Britain in approving commercial exhibitions of this sort. This enabled exhibitions to claim legitimacy as spaces for scientific research, visitor





FIGURE 3. Poster from a Galibi Exhibition at the Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation, Paris. Gallica – Bibliothèque national de France (<http://gallica.bnf.fr>).

education and, of course, the advancement of the colonial enterprise.

Leaving aside the displays of isolated individuals in theatres, exhibition halls, or fairgrounds (where the alleged “savage” sometimes proved to be a fraud), photographs and surviving information about the aforementioned commercial ethnological shows speak volumes about the relations which existed between the exhibitors and the exhibited. In nearly all cases the impresario was a European or North American, who wielded almost absolute control over the lives of their “workers”. Formal contracts did exist and legal control became increasingly widespread, especially in Great Britain, (Qureshi, 2011: 273) as the nineteenth century progressed. It is also evident, nevertheless, that this contractual relationship could not mask the dominating, exploitative and almost penitentiary conditions of the bonds created. Whether Inuit, Bushmen, Australians, Pygmies, Samoans or Fuegians, it is hard to accept that all contracted peoples were aware of the implications of this legal binding with their employer. Whilst most were not captured or kidnapped (although this was documented on more than one occasion)

it is reasonable to be skeptical about the voluntary nature of the commercial relationship. Moreover, those very same contracts (which they were probably unable to understand in the first place) committed the natives to conditions of travel, work and accommodation which were not always satisfactory. Very often their lives could be described as confined, not only when performances were taking place, but also when they were over. Exhibited individuals were very rarely given leave to move freely around the towns that the exhibitions visited.

The exploitative and inhuman aspects of some of these spectacles were particularly flagrant when they included children, who either formed part of the initial contingent of people, or swelled the ranks of the group when they were born on tour. On the one hand, the more primitive the peoples exhibited were, the more brutal their exhibition became and the circumstances in which it took place grew more painful. Conversely, conditions seemed to improve, albeit only to a limited extent, when individuals belonged to an ethnic group which was more “evolved”, “prouder”, held warrior status, or belonged to a local elite. This was true of certain





FIGURE 4. Ashanti Exhibition at the Retiro Parc, Madrid, 1897 (Photograph: A. S. Xatart). Museo Nacional de Antropología, Madrid. Reproduced with permission.

African groups who were particularly resistant to colonial domination, with the Ashanti being a case in point (figure 4). In spite of this, their subordinate position did not change.

There was, however, a certain type of commercial show in which the relations between the employer and the employees went beyond the merely commercial. More professionalised shows often required natives to demonstrate skills and give performances that would appeal to the audience. This was the case in some (of the more serious and elaborate) circus contexts and dramatised spectacles, the most notable of which was the acclaimed Wild West show. Directed by William Frederick Cody (1846–1917), the famous Buffalo Bill, the show featured cowboys, Mexicans, and members of various Native American ethnic groups (Kasson, 2000). This attraction, and many others that followed in the wake of its success, could be considered the predecessors of present-day theme park shows (figure 5).

Many of the shows which continued to endure during the interwar period were in some measure similar to those of the nineteenth century, although they were unable to match the popularity

of yesteryear. Whilst the stages were still set with reproduction native villages, as had been the case in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the exhibition and presentation of natives acquired a more fair-like and circus-like character, which harked back to the spectacles of the early-nineteenth century. Although it seems contradictory, colonial exhibitions at this time were in fact much larger and more numerous, as we shall see in the following section. It was precisely then, in the mid-1930s, that Nazi Germany, a very modern country with the most intensely-racist government, produced an ethnic show which illustrates the complexity of the human zoo phenomenon. The *Deutsche Afrika-Schau* (German African Show) provides an excellent example of the peculiar game which was played between owners, employees and public administrators, concerning the display of exotic human beings. The show, a striking and an incongruous fusion of variety spectacle and *Völkerschau*, toured several German towns between 1935 and 1940 (Lewerenz, 2006). Originally a private and strictly commercial business, it soon became a peculiar semi-official event in which African and Samoan men and women, resident in Germany, were legally employed to take part (figure 6). Complicated and unstable after its Nazification, the show aimed to facilitate the racial control of its participants while serving as a mechanism of ideological indoctrination and colonial propaganda. Incapable of profiting from the show, the Nazi regime would eventually abolish it.

After the Second World War, ethnic shows entered a phase of obvious decline. They were no longer of interest as a platform for the wild and exotic, mainly due to increasing competition from new and more accessible channels of entertainment, ranging from cinema to the beginnings of overseas tourism within Europe and beyond. While the occasional spectacle tried to profit from the ancient curiosity about the morbid and the unusual as late as the 1950s and even the 1960s, they were little more than crude and clumsy representations, which generated little interest among the public. Nowadays, as before, there are still contexts and spaces in which unique persons are portrayed, whether this is related to ethnicity or any other factor. These spectacles often fall into the category of artistic performances or take the banal form of reality TV.

## COLONIAL EXHIBITIONS: LEISURE, BUSINESS AND INDOCTRINATION

This category of exhibition was organised by either public administrations or private institutions linked to colonial enterprise, and very often featured some degree of collaboration between the two. The main aim of these events was to exhibit official colonial projects and private initiatives managed by entrepreneurs and colonial settlers, which were supposedly



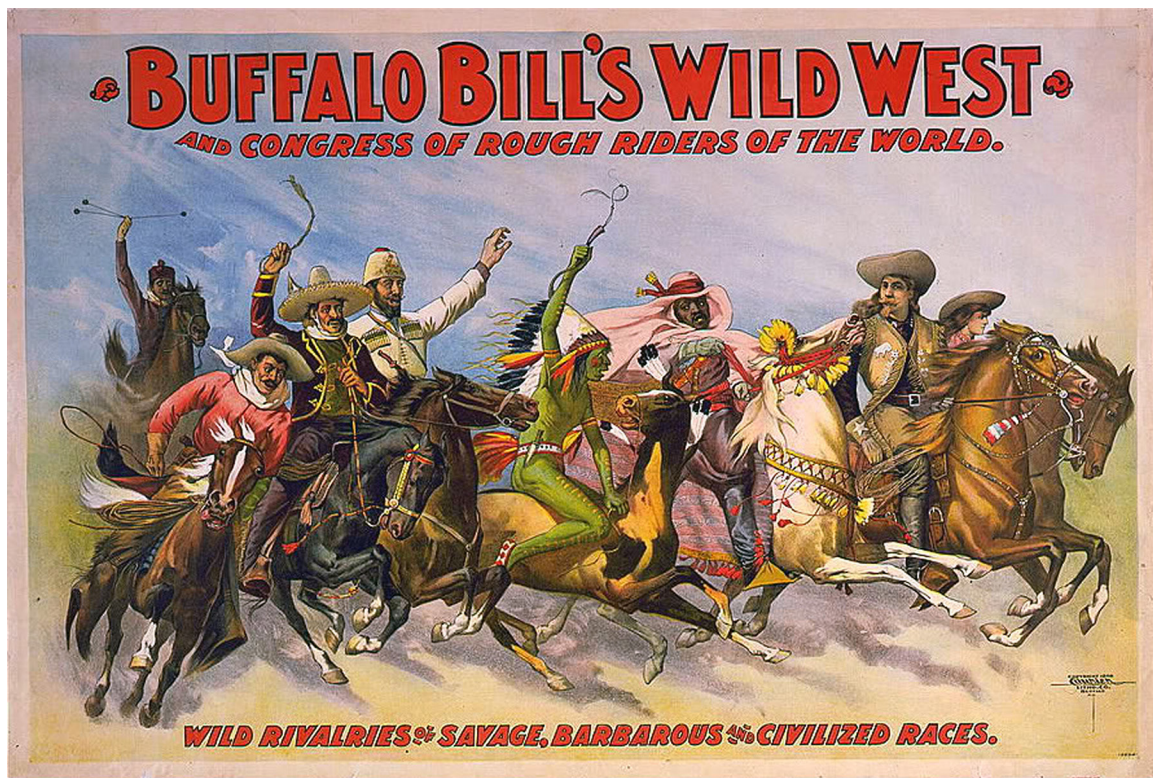


FIGURE 5. Poster from the Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, 1896. Net Mole: The History Science and Culture blog (<http://netmole.blogspot.com.es>).



FIGURE 6. Members of the *Deutsche Afrika-Schau*, 1938. Photo by P. Reed-Anderson (Möhle, n.d.).



intended to bring the wealth and well-being of the metropolis to the colonies. The presentation also carried an educational message, intended not only to reinforce the “national-colonial conscience” among its citizens, but also to project a powerful image of the metropolis to competing powers abroad. Faced with the likelihood that such content would prove rather unexciting and potentially boring for visitors, the organisers resorted to various additions which were considered more attractive and engaging. Firstly they devised a museum of sorts, in which ethnographic materials of the colonised peoples: their traditional dress, day-to-day objects, idols and weapons, were exhibited. These exotic and unusual pieces did draw the interest of the public, but, fearing that this would not be sufficient, the organisers knew that they could potentially sell thousands of tickets by offering the live display of indigenous peoples. If the exhibition was official, the natives constituted the ideal means by which to deliver the colonial message to the masses. In the case of private exhibitions, they were seen as the fastest and safest way to guarantee a show’s financial success.

Raw materials and a variety of other objects (including ethnographic exhibitions) from the colonies were already placed on show at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. These items were accompanied by a number of individuals originating from the same territories, either as visitors or as participants in the relevant section of the exhibition. However, such people cannot be considered as exhibits themselves; neither can similar colonial visitors at the Paris (1855) or London (1862) exhibitions; nor the Paris (1867) and (1878) exhibitions, which featured important colonial sections. It was only at the start of the 1880s that Europeans were able to enjoy the first colonial exhibitions proper, whether autonomous or connected (albeit with an identity and an entity of their own) to a universal or international exhibition. It could be argued that the Amsterdam International Colonial and Export Exhibition of 1883 acted as a letter of introduction for this model of event (Bloembergen, 2006) (figure 7), and it was quickly followed by the London Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 (Mathur, 2000) and, to a lesser though important extent, by the Madrid Philippines Exhibition of 1887 (Sánchez-Gómez, 2003). All three housed reproductions of native villages and exhibited dozens of individuals brought from the colonies. This was precisely what attracted the thousands of people who packed the venues. Such success would not have been possible by simply assembling a display of historical documents, photographs or ethnographic materials, no matter how exotic.

Thereafter, colonial exhibitions (almost all of which featured the live presence of native peoples) multiplied, whether they were autonomous or connected with national or international exhibitions.



FIGURE 7. Ethnic shows at the Amsterdam Colonial Exhibition, 1883 (Prince Roland Bonaparte, *Les habitants de Suriname*, Paris, 1884).

In France many municipalities and chambers of commerce began to organise their own exhibits, some of which (such as the Lyon Exhibition of 1894) were theoretically international in scope, although some of the most impressive exhibits held in the country were the colonial sections of the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889 (Palermo, 2003; Tran, 2007; Wyss, 2010) and 1900 (Wilson, 1991; Mabire, 2000; Geppert, 2010: 62–100). Equally successful were the colonial sections of the Belgian exhibitions of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which displayed the products and peoples of what was called the Congo Independent State (later the Belgian Congo), which until 1908 was a personal possession of King Leopold II. The most remarkable was probably the 1897 Tervuren Exhibition, an annex of the Brussels International Exposition of the same year (Wynants, 1997; Küster, 2006). In Germany, one of the European capitals of commercial ethnological shows, several colonial exhibitions were orchestrated as the overseas empire was being built between 1884 and 1918. Among them, the *Erste Deutsche Kolonialausstellung* or First German





FIGURE 8. Postcard from the *Deutsche Colonial-Ausstellung, Gewerbe Ausstellung* (German Colonial Exhibition, Industrial Exhibition, Berlin 1896). Historische Bildpostkarten, Universität Osnabrück, Sammlung Prof. Dr. S. Giesbrecht (<http://www.bildpostkarten.uni-osnabrueck.de>).

Colonial Exhibition, which was organised as a complement to the great Berlin *Gewerbeausstellung* (Industrial Exhibition) of 1896 (figure 8), was particularly successful (Arnold, 1995; Richter, 1995; Heyden, 2002).

As far as the United States was concerned, the country's late but impetuous arrival as a world power was almost immediately heralded by the phenomenon of the World's Fair, and the respective colonial sections (Rydell, 1984 y 1993; Rydell, Findling y Pelle, 2000). Whilst a stunning variety of ethnic performances were already on show at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, it was at Omaha, (1898) Buffalo, (1901) and above all at the 1904 Saint Louis Exhibition, that hundreds of natives were enthusiastically displayed with the purpose of publicising and gathering support for the complex and "heavy" civilising task ("The White Man's Burden") that the North American nation had to undertake in its new overseas possessions (Kramer, 1999; Parezo y Fowler, 2007).

In principle, those natives who took part in the live section of a colonial exhibition did so of their own accord, whether they were allegedly savage or civilised individuals, and regardless of whether the show had been organised through concessions to

private company owners or those who indirectly depended on public agencies. Although neither violence nor kidnapping has been recorded, it is highly unlikely that most of the natives who took up the invitation were fully aware of its implications: again, the great distances they had to travel, the discomforts they would endure and the situations in which they would be involved upon arrival in the metropolis.

Until the early-twentieth century, the sole purpose of native exhibitions was to attract an audience and to show, with the exemplar of a "real" image, the inferior condition of the colonised peoples and the need to continue the civilising mission in the far-away lands from which they came. In all cases their living conditions in the metropolis were unlikely to differ greatly from those of the participants in purely commercial shows: usually residing inside the exhibition venue, they were rarely free to leave without the express permission of their supervisors. However, it must be said that conditions were considerably better for the individuals exhibited when the shows were organised by government agencies, who always ensured that formal contracts were signed, and were probably unlikely to house people in the truly gruesome conditions present in some domains of the private sector. In some cases, added



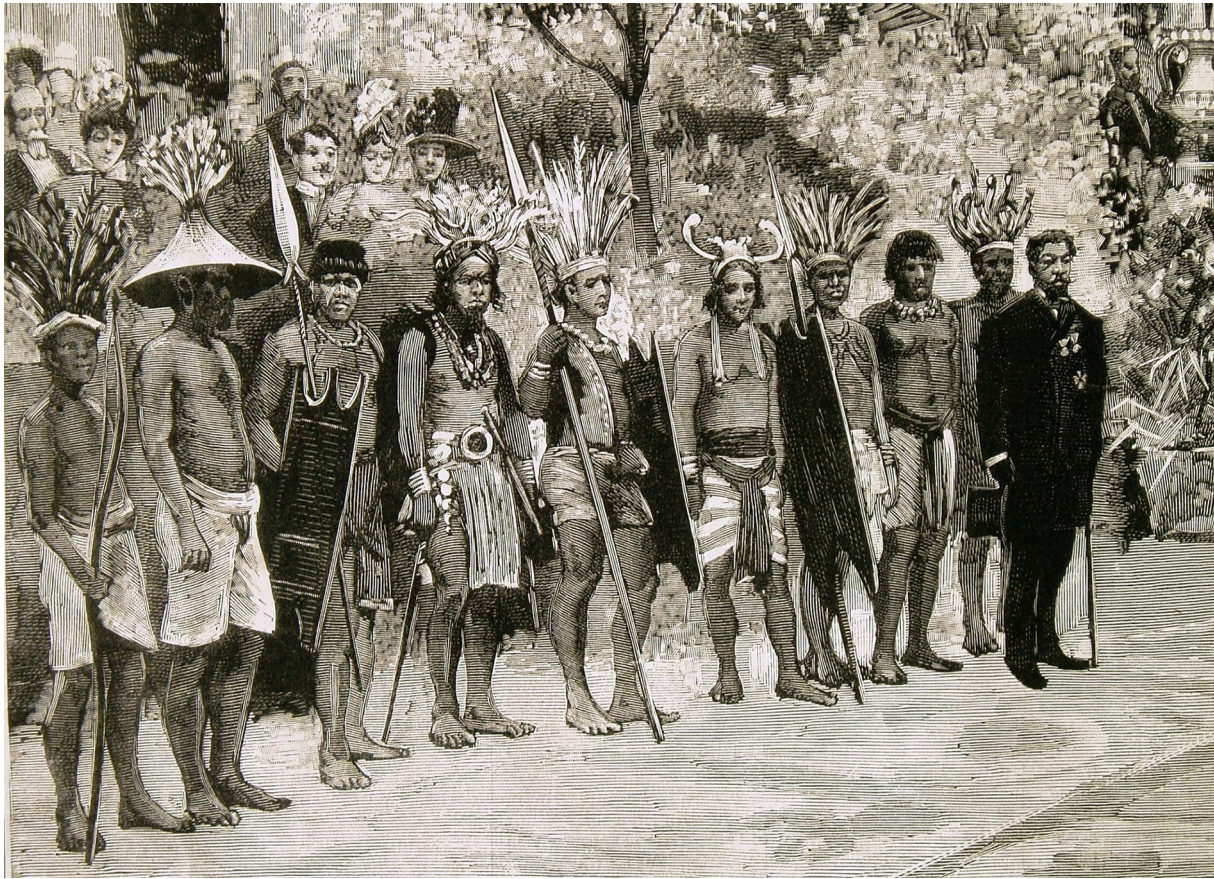


FIGURE 9. Opening of the Philippine Exhibition, Madrid, 1887 (detail). *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, July 8, 1887.

circumstances can be inferred which reveal a clear interest in “doing things properly”, by developing an ethical and responsible show, no matter how impossible this was in practice. Perhaps the clearest example of this kind of event is the Philippines Exhibition which was organized in Madrid in 1887.

The most striking feature of this exhibition was its stated educational purpose, to present a sample of the ethnic and social diversity of the archipelago. Other colonial exhibitions attempted to do the same, but in this case the intentions of the Spanish appeared to be more authentic and credible. Of course the aim was not to provide a lesson in island ethnography, but to prove the extent to which the Catholic Church had managed to convert the native population, and to show where savage tribes still existed. Representing the latter were, among others, several Tinguian and Bontoc persons (generically known as Igorots by the Spanish) and an Aeta person, referred to as a *Negrito* (figures 9 and 10). Several Muslim men and women from Mindanao and the Joló (Sulu) archipelago (known to the Spanish as *Moros* or “Moors”) also took part in the exhibition, not because they were considered savages

but on account of their pagan and unredeemed condition. Finally, as an example of the benefits of the colonial enterprise, Christian Filipinos (both men and women) were invited to demonstrate their artistic skill and craftsmanship and to sell their artisan products from various structures within the venue. All were legally employed and received regular payment until their return to the Philippines, which was very unusual for an exhibition at that time.

However, despite the “good intentions” of the administration, an obvious hierarchy can be inferred from the spatial pattern through which the Filipino presence in Madrid was organised. Individuals considered savage lived inside the exhibit enclosure and were under permanent control; they could visit the city but always in a scheduled and closely-directed way. Muslims, however, did not live inside the park, but in boarding houses and inns. Their movements were also restricted, but this was justified on the basis of their limited knowledge of their surroundings. Christians also lodged at inns, and although they did enjoy a certain autonomy, their status as “special guests” imposed a number of official commitments and the compulsory attendance of events.





FIGURE 10. Philippine Exhibition, Madrid, 1887. Jean Laurent & Co., Album *Exposición General de las Islas Filipinas en Madrid*, 1887. Patrimonio Nacional, Madrid (Guardiola, 2006).

Such differences became even more obvious, especially for the audience, not just because the savages lived inside the *ranchería* or native village, where they were exhibited, but also because their only purpose was to dance, gesture, eat and display their half-naked bodies. Muslims were not exhibited, nor did they have a clear or specific task to perform beyond merely “representing”. Christian men and women (cigar makers and artisans) simply performed their professional tasks in front of the audience, and were expected to complete a given timetable and workload as would any other worker.

In the light of the above, it may be concluded that the Philippines Exhibition of 1887 (specifically the *live* exhibition section) was conducted in a manner which questions the simplistic concept of a human zoo that many historians apply to these spectacles. Although there were certain similarities with commercial shows, we must admit that the Spanish government made considerable efforts to ensure that the exhibition, and above all the participation of the Filipinos, was carried out in a relatively dignified fashion. It must be reiterated that this is not

intended to project a benevolent image of nineteenth-century Spanish colonialism. The position of some of the exhibited, especially those considered savages, was not only subordinate but almost subhuman (almost being the key word), in spite of the fact that they received due payment and were relatively well fed. Moreover, we cannot forget that three of the participants (a Carolino man and woman, and a Muslim woman) died from diseases which were directly related to the conditions of their stay on the exhibition premises.

As the twentieth century advanced, colonial shows changed their direction and content, although it was some time before these changes took effect. The years prior to the First World War saw several national colonial exhibitions (Marseille and Paris in 1906; London in 1911),<sup>4</sup> (figure 11) two binational exhibitions (London, 1908 and 1910)<sup>5</sup> and a trinational (London, 1909),<sup>6</sup> which became benchmarks for exhibition organisers during the interwar years. The early twentieth century also saw several national colonial sections, which had varying degrees of impact, in three universal exhibitions organised





FIGURE 11. Poster from the Colonial Exhibition, Paris, 1906 (author: Firmin Bouisset). 1643–1945: L'Histoire par l'image (<http://www.histoire-image.org>).

in Belgium: Liège (1905), Brussels (1910) (figure 12) and Ghent (1913) and in several exhibitions organised in three different Italian cities, although none of these included a native section.<sup>7</sup> However, it was during the 1920s and 1930s that a true eclosion of national and international exhibitions, whose main focus was colonial or which included important colonial elements, occurred.<sup>8</sup> The time was not only ripe for ostentatious reasons, but also because the tension originated by certain European powers, especially Italy, encouraged a vindication of overseas colonies through the propaganda that was deployed at these events.

For all these reasons, and in addition to many other minor events, national colonial exhibitions were staged in Marseille (1922), Wembley (1924–25),<sup>9</sup> Stuttgart (1928),<sup>10</sup> Köln (1934), Oporto (1934), Freiburg im Breisgau (1935), Como (1937),<sup>11</sup> Glasgow (1938),<sup>12</sup> Dresden (1939), Vienna (1940) and Naples (1940).<sup>13</sup> At an international colonial level, the most important was the 1931 Parisian *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des Pays d'Outre Mer*. In addition, although they were not specialised international colonial exhibitions, outstanding and relevant colonial sections could be found at the Turin National Exhibition of 1928, the Iberian-American Exhibition of 1929, the Brussels Universal Exhibition of 1935,

the Paris International Exhibition of 1937 and the Lisbon National Exhibition of 1940.

At most of these events, a revised perspective of overseas territories was projected. Although, with some exceptions, metropolises continued to import indigenous peoples and persisted in presenting them as exotic, the focus was now shifted on to the results of the civilising process, as opposed to strident representations of savagery. This meant that it was no longer necessary for exhibited peoples to live at the exhibition venue. The aim was now to show the most attractive side of empire, and displays of the skills of its inhabitants, such as singing or dancing continued, albeit in a more serious, professional fashion. In principle, natives taking part in these exhibitions could move around more freely; in addition, they were all employed as any other professional or worker would be. However, once again the ethnic factor came into play, materialising under many different guises. For example, at the Paris Exhibition of 1931, people who belonged to “oriental civilisations” appeared at liberty to move around the venue, they were not put on display, and devoted their time to the activities for which they had been contracted (such as traditional songs and dances, handicrafts or sale of products). Once their working day was completed, they were free to visit the exhibition or





FIGURE 12. Poster from the Tervuren Colonial Exhibiton at the Brussels Universal Exhibition of 1910. Wikimedia Commons.



travel around Paris. However, the same could not be said for the Guineans arriving at the Seville Ibero-American Exhibition of 1929, where they were clearly depicted in a savagist context, similar to the way in which Africans had been displayed in colonial and even commercial exhibitions in the nineteenth century (Sánchez-Gómez, 2006).

Another interwar colonial exhibition which was unable to free itself from nineteenth-century stereotypes was the one held in Oporto in 1934, which included several living villages inhabited by natives, children included (Serén, 2001). Their presence in the city and the fact that they were displayed and lived within the same exhibition space was something that neither the press nor contemporary politicians saw fit to criticise. In fact it was the *pretos* (black African men) and especially *pretas* (black African women) who were the main attraction for thousands of visitors who thronged to the event, which was probably related to the fact that all the natives were bare-chested (figure 13). Interestingly, the Catholic Church did not take offense, perhaps interpreting the women shown as being merely “black savages” who had little to do with chaste Portuguese women. Of course they had no objections to the exhibition of human beings either.

Two interwar exhibitions (Seville and Oporto) have been cited as examples where the management

of indigenous participants markedly resembled the practices of the nineteenth century. However, this should not imply that other events refrained from the (more or less) sophisticated manipulation of the native presence. The most significant example was the Parisian International Colonial Exhibition of 1931.<sup>14</sup> Some historians highlight the fact that the general organiser, Marshall Lyautey, managed to impose his criterion that the exhibition should not include displays of the traditional “black villages” or “indigenous villages” inhabited by natives. Although it is true that the official (French and International) sections did not include this feature,<sup>15</sup> there can be little doubt that this was a gigantic ethnic spectacle, where hundreds of native peoples (who were present in the city as artists, artisans or simply as guests) were exhibited and manipulated as a source of propaganda of the highest order for the colonial enterprise. This is just one more example, although a particularly significant one, of the multifaceted character that ethnic shows acquired. It is difficult to define these simply on the basis of their brutality or “animal” characteristics, their closeness to Hagenbeck’s *Völkerschauen* or the anthropological exhibitions that were organised at the Jardin d’Acclimatation in late-nineteenth century Paris.

The last major European colonial exhibition took place in the anachronistic Belgian Congo section of



FIGURE 13. Postcard of Roshina, Guinean woman “Queen” of the First Colonial Portuguese Exhibition, Oporto, 1934. Photograph from the Casa Alvao. Delcampe.net (<http://timbres.delcampe.net>).

the Brussels Universal Exhibition of 1958, the first to be held after the Second World War.<sup>16</sup> In principle, its contents were organised around a discourse which defended the moral values of interracial fraternity and which set out to convince both Belgian society and the Congolese that Belgians were only in Congo to civilise, and not to exploit. In order to prove the authenticity of this discourse, the organisers went to great pains to avoid the jingoistic exoticism which had characterised most colonial exhibits thus far. In accordance with this, the event did not include the traditional, demeaning spectacle of natives living within the exhibition space. However, it did include an exotic section, where several dozen Congolese artisans demonstrated their skills to the audience and sold the products manufactured there in a context which was intended to be purely commercial. Unfortunately, the good will of the organisers was betrayed by an element of the public, who could not help confronting the Africans in a manner reminiscent of their grandparents back in 1897. This resulted in the artisans abruptly leaving the exhibition for Congo after being shocked by the insolence and bad manners of some of the visitors.

The Congolese presence in Brussels was not limited to these artisans: almost seven hundred Africans arrived, two hundred of which were tourists who had been invited with the specific purpose of visiting the exhibition. Most of them were members of the "Association of African Middle Classes", that is, they were part of the "evolved elite". The remaining figures were made up of people who were carrying out some sort of task in the colonial section of the exhibition, whether as specialised workers, dancers, guides or as assistants in the various sections, perhaps including some members of the Public Force, made up of natives. The presence in Brussels of the tourists, in particular, was part of a policy of association, which, according to the organisers, was intended to prepare "the Congolese population for the complete realisation of their human destiny." The Belgian population, in turn, would have the chance to become better acquainted with these people through a "direct, personal and free contact with the civilised Congolese" (Delhalle, 1985: 44). Neither this specific measure nor any others taken to bring blacks and whites closer seem to have had any practical effect whatsoever. In fact, although the Congolese visitors were cared for relatively well (although not without differences or setbacks), their movements during their stay in Brussels were under constant scrutiny, to prevent them from being "contaminated" by the "bad habits" of the metropolitan citizens.

Despite everything mentioned thus far, or perhaps even because of it, the 1958 exhibition was an enormous public success, on a par with the colonial events of the past. This time, as before, it was predicated on a largely negative image of the Congolese population. Barely any critical voices were heard

against the exhibiting model or the abuses of the colonial system, not even from the political left. Finally, as with earlier colonial exhibitions, it is obvious that what was shown in Brussels had little to do with the reality of life in Congo. In fact, as the exhibition closed down, in October 1958, Patrice Lumumba founded the Congolese National Movement. On the 11th of January of 1959, repression of the struggles for independence escalated into the bloody killings of Léopoldville, the colonial capital. Barely one year later, on the 30th of June 1960, Belgium formally acknowledged the independence of the new Democratic Republic of Congo; two years later Rwanda and Burundi followed.<sup>17</sup>

### MISSIONARY EXHIBITIONS: DOMINATION, FAITH AND SPECTACLE

The excitement that exhibitions generated in the second half of the nineteenth century provoked reactions from many quarters, including Christian churches. Of course, the event which shook Protestant propagandist sensibilities the hardest (as Protestants were the first to take part in the exhibition game) was the 1851 London Exhibition. However, the interest which both the Anglican Church and many evangelical denominations expressed in participating in this great event was initially met with hesitation and even rejection by the organisers (Cantor, 2011). Finally their participation was accepted, but only two missionary societies were authorised to officially become an integral part of the exhibition, and they could only do so as editors of printed religious works.

The problems that were documented in London in 1851 continued to affect events organised throughout the rest of the century; in fact, the presence of the Christian churches was permitted on only two occasions, both in Paris, at the exhibitions of 1867 and 1900. At the first of these, it was only Protestant organisations that participated, as the Catholic Church did not yet recognise the importance of such an event as an exhibitional showcase. By the time of the second, which was the last great exhibition of the nineteenth century and one of the most grandiose of all time, the situation had changed dramatically; both Protestants and Catholics participated and the latter (the French Church, to be precise) did so with greater success than its Protestant counterpart.<sup>18</sup>

The opposition that missionary societies encountered at nineteenth-century international exhibitions encouraged them to organise events of their own. The first autonomous missionary events were Protestant and possibly took place prior to 1851. In any case, this has been confirmed as the year that the Methodist Wesleyan Missionary Society organised a missionary exhibition (which took place at the same time as the International Exhibition). Small in size and very simple in structure, it was held for only two days during the month of June, although it



provided the extraordinary opportunity to see and acquire shells, corals and varied ethnographic materials (including idols) from Tonga and Fiji.<sup>19</sup> The exhibition's aim was very specific: to make a profit from ticket sales and the materials exhibited and to seek general support for the missionary enterprise.

Whether or not they were directly influenced by the international event of 1851, the modest British missionary exhibitions of the mid-nineteenth century began to evolve rapidly from the 1870s, reaching truly spectacular proportions in the first third of the twentieth century. This enormous success was due to a particular set of circumstances which were not true for the Catholic sphere. Firstly, the exhibits were a fantastic source of propaganda, and furthermore, they generated a direct and immediate cash income. This is significant considering that Protestant church societies and committees neither depended upon, nor were linked to (at least not directly or officially) civil administration and almost all revenue came from the personal contributions of the faithful. Secondly, because Protestants organised their own events, there was no reason for them to participate in the official colonial exhibitions, with which the Catholic missions became repeatedly involved once the old prejudices of government had fallen away by the later years of the nineteenth century. In this way, evangelical communities were able to maintain their independence from the imperial enterprise, yet in a manner that did not preclude them from collaborating with it whenever it was in their interests to do so.

However, whether Catholic or Protestant, the main characteristic of the missionary exhibitions in the timeframe of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, was their ethnological intent (Sánchez-Gómez, 2013). The ethnographic objects of converted peoples (and of those who had yet to be converted) were noteworthy for their exoticism and rarity, and became a true magnet for audiences. They were also supposedly irrefutable proof of the “backward” and even “depraved” nature of such peoples, who had to be liberated by the redemptive missions which all Christians were expected to support spiritually and financially. But as tastes changed and the public began to lose interest, the exhibitions started to grow in size and complexity, and increasingly began to feature new attractions, such as dioramas and sculptures of native groups. Finally, the most sophisticated of them began to include the natives themselves as part of the show. It must be said that, but for rare exceptions, these were not exhibitions in the style of the famous German *Völkerschauen* or British ethnological exhibitions, but mere performances; in fact, the “guests” had already been baptized, were Christians, and allegedly willing to collaborate with their benefactors.

Whilst the Protestant churches (British and North American alike) produced representations

of indigenous peoples with the greatest frequency and intensity, it was (as far as we know) the (Italian) Catholic Church that had the dubious honour of being the first to display natives at a missionary exhibition, and did so in a clearly savagist and rudimentary fashion, which could even be described as brutal. This occurred in the religious section of the Italian-American Exhibition of Genoa in 1892 (Bottaro, 1984; Perrone, n.d.). As a shocking addition to the usual ethnographic and missionary collections, seven natives were exhibited in front of the audience: four Fuegians and three Mapuches of both sexes (children, young and fully-grown adults) brought from America by missionaries (figure 14). The Fuegians, who were dressed only in skins and armed with bows and arrows, spent their time inside a hut made from branches which had been built in the garden of the pavilion housing the missionary exhibition. The Mapuches were two young girls and a man; the three of them lived inside another hut, where they made handicrafts under the watchful eye of their keepers.

The exhibition appears to have been a great success, but it must have been evident that the model was too simple in concept, and inhumanitarian in its approach to the indigenous people present. In fact, whilst subsequent exhibitions also featured a native presence (always Christianised) at the invitation of the clergy, the Catholic Church never again fell into such a rough presentation and representation of the obsolete and savage way of life of its converted. To provide an illustration of those times, now happily overcome by the missionary enterprise, Catholic congregations resorted to dioramas and sculptures, some of which were of superb technical and artistic quality.

Although the Catholic Church may have organised the first live missionary exhibition, it should not be forgotten that they joined the exhibitional sphere much later than the evangelical churches. Also, a considerable number of their displays were associated with colonial events, something that the Protestant churches avoided. This happened, for example, at the colonial exhibitions of Lyon (1894), Berlin 1896 (although this also involved Protestant churches) and Brussels-Tervuren (1897), as well as at the National Exhibition of 1898 in Turin. Years later, the great colonial (national and international) exhibitions of the interwar period continued to receive the enthusiastic and uncritical participation of Catholic missions (although some, as in 1931, included Protestant missions too). The most remarkable examples were the Iberian-American Exhibition of Seville in 1929, the International Exhibitions held at Amberg (1930) and Paris (1931), and the Oporto (1934) and Lisbon (1937 and 1940) National Exhibitions.<sup>20</sup> This colonial-missionary association did not prevent the Catholic Church from organising its own autonomous exhibitions, through which it tried to emulate





FIGURE 14. Fueguians at the Italian-American Exhibition of Genoa in 1892 (Bottaro, 1984).

and even surpass its more experienced Protestant counterpart. Their belated effort culminated in two of the most spectacular Christian missionary exhibitions of all time: the Vatican Missionary Exhibition of 1925 and the Barcelona Missionary Exhibition of 1929, which was associated with the great international show of that year (Sánchez-Gómez, 2007 and 2006). Although both events documented native nuns and priests as visitors, no humans were exhibited. Again, dioramas and groups of sculptures were featured, representing both religious figures and indigenous peoples (figures 15 y 16).

Let us return to the Protestant world. Whilst it was the reformed churches that most readily incorporated native participation, they seemed to do so in a more sensitive and less brutalised manner than the Genoese Catholic Exhibition of 1892. We know of their presence at the first North American exhibitions: one of which was held at the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, celebrated in New York in 1909 and, most significantly, at the great interdenominational The World in Boston Exhibition, in 1911 (Hasinoff, 2011). Native participation has also

been recorded at the two most important British contemporary exhibitions: The Orient in London (held by the London Missionary Society in 1908) (figure 17) and Africa in the East (organised by the Church Missionary Society in 1909). Both exhibitions toured a number of British towns until the late 1920s, although for the most part without indigenous participation (Coombes, 1994; Cheang, 2006–2007).<sup>21</sup> However, the most spectacular Protestant exhibition, with hundreds of natives, dozens of stands, countless parades, theatrical performances, the latest thrill rides and exotic animals on display, was the gigantic Centenary Exhibition of American Methodist Missions, celebrated in Columbus in 1919 and popularly known as the Methodist's World Fair (Anderson, 2006).

The exhibition model at these early-twentieth century Protestant events was very similar to the colonial model. Native villages were reconstructed and ethnographic collections were presented, alongside examples of local flora and fauna, and of course, an abundance of information about missionary work, in which its evangelising, educational,





FIGURE 15. A Mapuche family being indoctrinated by a Capuchin missionary. Sculptural group at the Vatican Missionary Exhibition of 1925 (Considine, 1925).

medical and welfare aspects were presented. Some of these were equally as attractive to the audience (irrespective of their religious beliefs) as contemporary colonial or commercial exhibitions. However, it may be noted that the participation of Christianised natives took a radically different form from those of the colonial and commercial world. Those who were most capable and had a good command of English served as guides in the sections corresponding to their places of origin, a task that they tended to carry out in traditional clothing. More frequently these new Christians assumed roles with less responsibility, such as the manufacture of handicrafts, the sale of exotic objects or the recreation of certain aspects of their previous way of life. The organisers justified their presence by claiming that they were merely actors, representing their now-forgotten savage way of life. This may very well have been the case.

At the Protestant exhibitions of the 1920s and 1930s, the presence of indigens became progressively less common until it eventually disappeared. This notwithstanding, the organisers came to benefit from a living resource which complemented displays of ethnographic materials whilst being more

attractive to the audience than the usual dioramas. This was a theatrical representation of the native way of life (combined with scenes of missionary interaction) by white volunteers (both men and women) who were duly made up and in some cases appeared alongside real natives (figure 18). Some of these performances were short, but others consisted of several acts and featured dozens of characters on stage. Regardless of their form, these spectacles were inherent to almost any British and North American exhibition, although much less frequent in continental Europe.

Since the 1960s, the Christian missionary exhibition (both Protestant and Catholic) has been conducted along very different lines from those which have been discussed here. All direct or indirect associations with colonialism have been definitively given up; it has broken with racial or ethnological interpretations of converted peoples, and strongly defends its reputed autonomy from any political groups or interests, without forgetting that the essence of evangelisation is to maximize the visibility of its educational and charitable work among the most disadvantaged.

## FINAL WORD

The three most important categories of modern ethnic show –commercial ethnological exhibitions, colonial exhibitions and missionary exhibitions– have been examined. All three resorted, to varying degrees, to the exhibition of exotic human beings in order to capture the attention of their audience, and, ultimately, to achieve certain goals: be they success in business and personal enrichment, social, political or financial backing for the colonial enterprise, or support for missionary work. Whilst on occasion they coincided at the same point in time and within the same context of representation, the uniqueness of each form of exhibition has been emphasised. However, this does not mean that they are completely separate phenomena, or that their representation of exotic “otherness” is homogeneous.

Missionary exhibitions displayed perhaps the most singular traits due to their spiritual vision. However, it is clear that many made a determined effort to produce direct, visual and emotional spectacles and some, in so doing, resorted to representations of natives which were very similar to those of colonial exhibitions. Can we speak then, of a convergence of designs and interests? I honestly do not think so. At many colonial exhibitions, organisers showed a clear intention to portray natives as fearsome, savage individuals (sometimes even describing them as cannibals) who somehow needed to be subjugated. Peoples who were considered, to a lesser or greater extent, to be civilised were also displayed (as at the interwar exhibitions). However, the purpose of this was often to publicise the success of the





FIGURE 16. Carolinian family. Sculptural group exhibited by the Jesuits at the Spanish Missionary Exhibition, Barcelona, 1929 (*Revista de la Exposición Misional Española*, November, 1929).

colonial enterprise in its campaign for “the domestication of the savage”, rather than to present a message of humanitarianism or universal fraternity. Missionary exhibitions provided information and material examples of the former way of life of the converted, in which natives demonstrated that they had abandoned their savage condition and participated in the exhibition for the greater glory of the evangelising mission. Moreover, they also became living evidence that something much more transcendent than any civilising process was taking place: that once they had been baptised, anyone, no matter how wild they had once been, could become part of the same universal Christian family.

It is certainly true that the shows that the audiences enjoyed at all of these exhibitions (whether missionary, colonial or even commercial) were very similar. Yet in the case of the former, the act of exhibition took place in a significantly more humanitarian context than in the others. And while it is evident that indigenous cultures and peoples were clearly manipulated in their representation at missionary exhibitions, this did not mean that the exhibited native was merely a passive element in the game. And there is something more. The dominating and spectacular qualities present in almost

all missionary exhibitions should not let us forget one last factor which was essential to their conception, their development and even their longevity: Christian faith. Without Christian faith there would have been no missionary exhibitions, and had anything similar been organised, it would not have had the same meaning. It was essential that authentic Christian faith existed within the ecclesiastical hierarchy and within those responsible for congregations, missionary societies and committees. But the faith that really made the exhibitions possible was the faith of the missionaries, of others who were involved in their implementation and, of course, of those who visited. Although it was never recognised as such, this was perhaps an uncritical faith, complacent in its acceptance of the ways in which human diversity was represented and with ethical values that occasionally came close to the limits of Christian morality. But it was a faith nonetheless, a faith which intensified and grew with each exhibition, which surely fuelled both Christian religiosity (Catholic and Protestant alike) and at least several years of missionary enterprise, years crucial for the imperialist expansionism of the West. It is an objective fact that the display of human beings at commercial and colonial shows was always much more



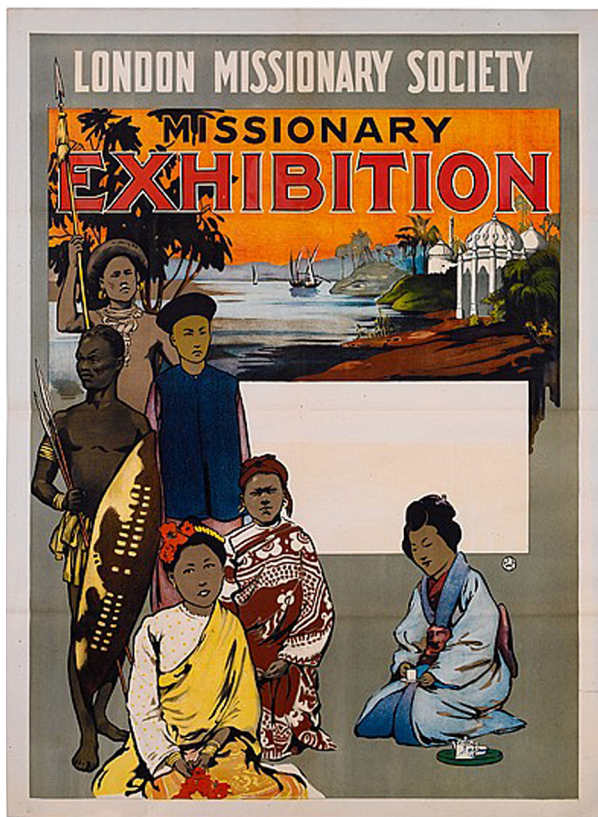


FIGURE 17. Poster for the missionary exhibitions of the London Missionary Society, c. 1910. Artifact (<http://www.artifact.com>).

explicit and degrading than at any missionary exhibition. To state what has just been proposed more bluntly: missionary exhibitions were not “human zoos”. However, it is less clear whether the remaining categories: are commercial and colonial exhibitions worthy of this assertion (human zoos), or were they polymorphic ethnic shows of a much greater complexity?

The principal analytical obstacle to the use of the term “human zoo” is that it makes an immediate and direct association between all of these acts and contexts and the idea of a nineteenth-century zoo. The images of caged animals, growling and howling, may cause admiration, but also disgust; they may sometimes inspire tenderness, but are mainly something to be avoided and feared due to their savage and bestial condition. This was definitely the case for the organisers of the scientific and editorial project cited at the beginning of this article, so it can be no surprise that Carl Hagenbeck’s joint exhibitions of exotic animals and peoples were chosen as the frame of reference for human zoos. Although the authors state in the first edition that “the human zoo is not the exhibition of savagery but its construction” [“le zoo humain n’est pas l’exhibition

de la sauvagerie, mais la construction de celle-ci”] (Bancel *et al.*, 2002: 17), the problem, as Blanckaert (2002) points out, is that this alleged construction or exhibitional structure was not present at most of the exhibitions under scrutiny, nor (and this is an added of mine) at those shown at the *Exhibitions. L’invention du sauvage* exhibit.

Indeed, the expression “human zoo” establishes a model which does not fit with the meagre number of exhibitions of exotic individuals from the sixteenth, seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, nor with that of Saartjie Baartmann (the Hottentot Venus) of the early nineteenth century, much less with the freak shows of the twentieth century. Furthermore, this model can neither be compared to most of the nineteenth-century British human ethnological exhibitions, nor to most of the native villages of the colonial exhibitions, nor to the Wild West show of Buffalo Bill, let alone to the ruralist-traditionalist villages which were set up at many national and international exhibitions until the interwar period. Ultimately, their connection with many wandering “black villages” or “native villages” exhibited by impresarios at the end of the nineteenth century could also be disputed. Moreover, many of the shows organised by Hagenbeck number amongst the most professional in the exhibitional universe. The fact that they were held in zoos should not automatically imply that the circumstances in which they took place were more brutal or exploitative than those of any of the other ethnic shows.

It is evident from all the shows which have been discussed, that the differential racial condition of the persons exhibited not only formed the basis of their exhibition, but may also have fostered and even founded racist reactions and attitudes held by the public. However, there are many other factors (political, economic and even aesthetic) which come into play and have barely been considered, which could be seen as encouraging admiration of the displays of bodies, gestures, skills, creations and knowledge which were seen as both exotic and seductive.

In fact, the indiscriminate use of the very successful concept of “human zoo” generates two fundamental problems. Firstly it impedes our “true” knowledge of the object of study itself, that is, of the very varied ethnic shows which it intends to catalogue, given the great diversity of contexts, formats, persons in charge, objectives and materialisations that such enterprises have to offer. Secondly, the image of the zoo inevitably recreates the idea of an exhibition which is purely animalistic, where the only relationship is that which exists between exhibitor and exhibited: the complete domination of the latter (irrational beasts) by the former (rational beings). If we accept that the exhibited are treated merely as as more-or-less worthy animals, the consequences are twofold: a logical rejection of such shows past, present and future, and the visualization of the exhibited



FIGURE 18. White men and women representing Native Americans at *The World in Boston* missionary exposition, 1911, postcard. Ebay (www.ebay.com).

as passive victims of racism and capitalism in the West. It is therefore of no surprise that the research barely considers the role that these individuals may have played, the extent to which their participation in the show was voluntary and the interests which may have moved some of them to take part in these shows. Ultimately, no evaluation has been made of how these shows may have provided “opportunity contexts” for the exhibited, whether as commercial, colonial or missionary exhibitis. Whilst it is true that the exhibited peoples’ own voice is the hardest to record in any of these shows, greater effort could have been made in identifying and mapping them, as, when this happens, the results obtained are truly interesting (Dreesbach, 2005: 78).

Before we conclude, it must be said that the proposed analysis does not intend to soften or justify the phenomenon of the ethnic show. Even in the least dramatic and exploitative cases it is evident that the essence of these shows was a marked inequality, in which every supposed “context of interaction” established a dichotomous relationship between black and white, North and South, colonisers and colonised, and ultimately, between dominators and dominated. My intention has been to propose a more-or-less classifying and clarifying approach to this varied world of human exhibitions, to make a basic inventory of their forms of representation

and to determine which are the essential traits that define them, without losing sight of the contingent factors which they rely upon.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

1. In order to avoid loading the text through the excessive use of punctuation marks, I have decided not to put words as blacks, savages or primitives in inverted commas; but by no means does this mean my acceptance of their contemporary racist connotations.
2. Apart from its magnificent catalogue, the contents of the exhibition are also available online: [http://www.quaibrantly.fr/uploads/tx\\_gayafeespacepresse/MQB\\_DP\\_Exhibitions\\_01.pdf](http://www.quaibrantly.fr/uploads/tx_gayafeespacepresse/MQB_DP_Exhibitions_01.pdf) [accessed 13/November/2012].
3. Missionary exhibitions are not an integral part of the repertoire of exhibitions studied as part of the French project on “Human zoos”, nor do they appear at the great Quai de Branly exhibition of 2012.
4. The Marseille and Paris exhibitions competed with each other. The Festival of Empire was organised in London to celebrate the coronation of George V, thus also being known as the Coronation Exhibition. For more information about these and other British colonial exhibitions, or exhibitions which had important colonial sections, organised between 1890 and 1914, see Coombes (1994: 85–108) and Mackenzie (2008).



5. These were the Franco-British exhibition (1908) and the Japan-British Exhibition (1910); although their contents were not exclusively colonial these do make up an important part of the exhibitions. They are both private and run by the successful show businessman Imre Kiralfy. For the former, see Coombes (1994: 187–213), Leymarie (2009) and Geppert (2010: 101–133); and for the latter, Mutsu (2001).
  6. This was the International Imperial Exhibition, where the Great Britain, France and Russia took part, although other countries also had a minor presence. It was organized by the businessman Imre Kiralfy.
  7. The exhibition fever of those years even hit Japan, where colonial and anthropological exhibitions were organized in Osaka (1903) and Tokyo (1913). These showed Ainu peoples and persons from the newly incorporated territories of the Japanese Empire (Siddle, 1996; Nanta, 2011).
  8. For a good summary of the extensive colonial propaganda movement which spread around Europe during the interwar period (with detailed references to the exhibitions) see Stanard (2009).
  9. British Empire Exhibition.
  10. After its defeat in the Great War, the 119 Versailles Treaty article specified that Germany should give up all its overseas territories. Therefore, whenever exhibitions were celebrated during the interwar period Germany lacked any possessions whatsoever. Thus, German competitions mentioned (including Vienna) were nothing but mere patriotic exhibitions of colonial revisionism, which were celebrated during the Weimar Republic and reached their heyday in the Nazi era.
  11. This was the *Mostra Coloniale Celebrativa della Vittoria Imperiale*, a propagandist national-colonial exhibition of a strong rationalist character.
  12. This was the British Empire Exhibition.
  13. This was the grandiose *Prima* (and unique) *mostra triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare*, which was to be celebrated between the 9 of May and the 15 of October 1940, and which was suspended after a month owing to Mussolini's declaration of war on France and Great Britain. See Kivelitz (1999: 162–171), Abbattista and Labanca (2008), Vargaftig (2010) and, more specifically, Dore (1992).
  14. The available literature on the exhibition of 1931 is very abundant. A very brief selection of titles could include the following: Ageron (1984), Blévis *et al.* (2008), Exposition Coloniale (2006), Hodeir and Pierre (1991), L'Estoile (2007), Lebovics (2008) and Morton (2000).
  15. However, the organization of two purely commercial ethnological exhibitions was authorized.
  16. On the Congolese section of the 1958 Brussels exhibition, the works of Cornelis (2005), Halen (1995), and Stanard (2005 and 2011) can be used as references.
  17. The territory of Rwanda-Urundi (former German colony of Rwanda and Burundi) was administered as a trusteeship by Belgium from 1924, on accepting a League of Nations mandate which was renewed through the UN after the end of the Second World War.
  18. For the encounters and disagreements between Christian exhibitions and Universal exhibitions during the nineteenth century, see Sánchez-Gómez (2011).
  19. *The New-Zealander* (Auckland), 22 October 1851. Available at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast> [accessed 3/April/2009].
  20. This was the Historical Exhibition of Occupation (1937) and the Exhibition of the Portuguese World (1940); For the Catholic Church's participation in these events, see Sánchez-Gómez (2009).
  21. The presence of natives has not been recorded at Protestant exhibitions celebrated in France, Sweden, Switzerland or Germany during those years.
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